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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ABUJA 001270

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA

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TAGS: KISL PREL PGOV NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR LEADS FURTHER OUTREACH ON  
POTUS CAIRO SPEECH IN NIGERIA'S ISLAMIC NORTHEAST: BORNO,  
GOMBE, YOBE

REF: A. ABUJA 332  
    1B. ABUJA 745 AND PREVIOUS  
    1C. STATE 071325

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d)

¶1. (U) Summary: In conjunction with the Mission's outreach to the Nigerian Muslim community, Ambassador took President Obama's Cairo speech on the road, traveling (with PolOff notetaker and other Mission members) to Northeastern Nigeria on June 29 - July 2, and in the Southwest July 3-6 (with Consular Officer notetaker). The trip to the northeast's highlight was a two day stay in Borno - a stronghold of Islamic civilization and scholarship for many centuries - where Ambassador held a roundtable discussion with Islamic and traditional leaders, and gave a policy speech echoing President Obama's message in Cairo of "A New Beginning". In addition, Ambassador expressed our support for the Muslim community and mutual understanding through meetings with Gombe State Deputy Governor, Yobe State Governor and Borno State Governor (see septel). She also visited traditional religious leaders; met with students; and commissioned two CDC hospital projects. End Summary.

Roundtable with Key Muslim Leaders on POTUS Cairo Speech

¶2. (SBU) On July 1, in partnership with the Borno State government, Ambassador hosted fifteen Sheikhs, Imams, and Islamic scholars for a roundtable discussion with the intention of continuing the dialogue President Obama began with the Muslim world during his speech in Cairo. Ambassador expressed the USG's interest in working hand-in-hand with members of the Islamic community toward common goals. She emphasized the United States is a diverse religious nation with millions of Muslim Americans. The Borno State Deputy Governor, called the new beginning "a welcome development." He also noted that Ambassador's outreach in Maiduguri not only has an important impact the local community, but also because of the proximity to neighboring countries, will influence communities in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Participants expressed appreciation for the Ambassador's presence in the Northeast and were happy to see various segments of Islamic society that had been invited to the roundtable. Many of the scholars encouraged Americans to read Islamic books and to continue visiting Muslim countries in order to ease suspicions and increase understanding.

¶3. (SBU) Many of the Muslim leaders commended President Obama and the USG for initiating dialogue with the Muslim world. One participant commented, "Obama's words indicate a new direction." Another participant said Obama's election "practicalized the idea of democracy." However, participants in the roundtable discussion also expressed their concerns regarding U.S. Foreign Policy and the United States's perceived efforts to influence Islam. In response, Ambassador said our goal is to build mutual understanding, not to divide and conquer Islamic sects or to intervene with the precepts of Islam. She highlighted several positive actions the President has taken, such as the reduction of American troops from cities in Iraq and signing the proclamation to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay. She restated President Obama's commitment to a two state solution in the Middle East as noted in his Cairo speech, and encouraged the participants to take the President at his word, and give him a chance to show his commitment. In response to questions about the rights of countries to possess nuclear weapons, Ambassador said the President noted that the United States is working toward the goal of living in peace in a world free of nuclear weapons. Participants also requested that the United States limit the exportation of media which is seen as damaging to Muslim youth. In response, Ambassador recognized the sensitivity but was clear that freedom of the press is essential to democracy and censorship is not the American way. In addition, several individuals asked for USG assistance in combating desertification, restoring Lake Chad, and ensuring free and fair elections in Nigeria.

ABUJA 00001270 002 OF 004

#### Taking Obama's "New Beginning" on the Road

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¶4. (U) On July 1, Ambassador gave a speech entitled, "A New Beginning - Reaffirming America's Partnership with Nigeria" to government officials, religious and traditional leaders, university students and faculty, community and business leaders, as well as journalists. The intent of the speech was to echo the messages of President Obama's speech in Cairo in the conservative Muslim Northeast. Ambassador said the many programs which the USG does with Nigeria in areas such as education, health, agriculture are all part of the people of America's attempt to build mutual understanding across nations and particularly with the Muslim world. She expressed that the United States is entering a new beginning with Muslims and other diverse people around the world with the goal of living in harmony and peace. She emphasized that the USG wants to listen and learn in order to work with other nations to ensure that the next generations grow up in a peaceful and prosperous world. Ambassador acknowledged the world's debt to Islam and Borno's contributions to that rich tradition. Building on the new partnerships President Obama outlined in his speech, and A/S Carson's recently stated priorities for Africa, Ambassador maintained that the USG will work with Nigeria to 1) promote and strengthen democratic institutions and rule of law; 2) encourage long-term development; 3) assist in the prevention and resolution of conflict; 4) help address challenges; and 5) remember to listen and learn.

¶5. (U) Ambassador acknowledged the progress already achieved in Nigerian democracy, but she emphasized that elections alone do not create democracy. Instead, she said there must be space for and respect of various ideas, including from civil society. She also said the United States can help when asked, but Nigerians must lead in electoral reform in Nigeria. She said fighting corruption is an important pillar of democracy and Nigeria must use its anti-corruption framework to ensure government revenues benefit all the Nigerian people. Ambassador said another pillar of democracy is respect for religion. Ambassador praised the examples of Christians and Muslims in Jos and Bauchi who during the violent conflicts offered protection to friends and strangers

alike, regardless of their religion as "important steps" in overcoming religious differences (refs A and B). In addition, Ambassador said women's rights, education, and functioning health care systems are fundamental to democracies, as well as successful commercial and agricultural sectors. She also added that peace and security in Nigeria and throughout the world are fundamental to democracy. She said we are listening carefully to the discussions going on now about amnesty in the Niger Delta because we, as friends of Nigeria, want the region to be conflict-free so development can thrive, noting that the protection of civilians in the region is paramount.

**¶16.** (SBU) After the speech audience members asked questions about what the USG is doing to assist Nigeria in food security, improve health-care, to address climate change, combat corruption, decrease poverty, and support girls' education. In response, Ambassador said the United States is one of the largest development donors in the world. She provided examples of USG programs in Nigeria which address climate change, agriculture, education, health care, and other development issues. Some individuals, including members of the press, said western media often misrepresent situations, such as the realities of the conflicts in the Niger Delta. Ambassador responded to their concerns by explaining that the United States does not censor the media and encouraged individuals to tell their own stories to news agencies. Others questioned the United States' sincerity on a new beginning with the Muslim world while sending U.S. military to Afghanistan and other parts of the world. In response, Ambassador clarified that the United States will continue to fight terrorism wherever it is found, but she stressed that the United States itself is a diverse religious nation, and that we are friends of the Muslim world and that we have no policy that seeks to spur conflict between Muslim

ABUJA 00001270 003 OF 004

sects, as was being suggested by the question.

#### Separate Meetings with Emirs

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**¶17.** (U) While in the Northeast, Ambassador called on two of the key Emirs of the region. On June 29, Ambassador visited the Emir of Gombe, who thanked her for taking the time to travel to the region and encouraged increased visits to promote mutual understanding. He said, "no country will survive without the aid of America." He also asked the USG help Nigeria's institutions and provide assistance in infrastructure and technology to help the Nigerian people. On June 30, Ambassador called on the new Shehu of Borno, Abubakar Ibn Umar Garbai Al-Amin El-Kanemi, who is recognized as the second ranked Nigerian Emir after the Sultan of Sokoto. The Shehu welcomed the Ambassador and said he was impressed by, and appreciated the visit from the Ambassador and her delegation. He noted President Obama's speech in Cairo was a "useful speech for all of us."

#### Student Outreach on POTUS Cairo Speech

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**¶18.** (U) On June 29, Ambassador met with Vice Chancellor Professor Abdullahi Mahdi at Gombe State University as well as a group of 35 students from the Student Union. Students asked Ambassador questions about President Obama's Cairo Speech, USG support for Nigeria, and opportunities for students. In regards to Obama, students were curious to know about him personally, questioned why he was making his first trip to sub-Saharan Africa to Ghana, and asked how he will live up to his commitments. In response, Ambassador cited some examples of the President's actions thus far, and encouraged students to listen to what President Obama says, and be less focused on where the speech is given. On USG support for Nigeria, Ambassador said the United States has 4 pillars of support for Nigeria, which are synergistic with Nigeria's Seven Point Agenda: economic development, investing in people through health and education, governing justly, and peace and security. Finally, in regard to support for

students, Ambassador invited students to participate in Post's annual college fairs and offered assistance from our educational advising center.

¶19. (U) On July 1, Vice Chancellor Professor Mala Daura welcomed Ambassador to the University of Maiduguri - the largest in the Northeast with more than 35,000 students and 4,000 faculty and staff. Daura accompanied Ambassador to the American Corner located in the Ramat University library where she presented the coordinator with sets of books, media tools, and several commemorative copies of President Obama's Cairo Speech.

¶10. (U) On July 1, Ambassador also visited Abbaganaram Junior Secondary School, where she presented MIST book bags and several boxes of books to 40 recipients of the Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program (AGSP) and talked about the important of leadership in the community and mutual understanding. The school's principal said that since the commencement of the AGSP at the school, parents have become more involved and the government has provided additional assistance.

#### Commissioning of Hospital Projects

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¶11. (U) On June 29, Ambassador and CDC Country Director visited the Gombe State Specialist Hospital, a USG supported site through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to commission the facility's new USG-funded laboratory and adherence room.

#### POTUS Cairo Speech in the Southwest

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¶12. (U) On July 6, Ambassador and Mission team traveled to the Southwest to Ondo and Ekiti States, where she held another roundtable with democracy and human rights groups. They discussed the turbulent local elections and the need for electoral reform. The group touched on messages from the

ABUJA 00001270 004 OF 004

POTUS Cairo Speech such as the importance of governments who take care of their people and promote transparency in holding free and fair elections.

¶13. (C) Comment: The roundtable with 15 Imams, Sheikhs, and Islamic scholars underscored the suspicions that still linger in this part of Nigeria as regard to U.S. intentions with the Muslim World despite recent efforts to turn this around. The positive aspect was that this outreach to many Imams and Islamic leaders who had never interacted with the U.S. Mission was welcomed by all and showed that we are prepared to listen and learn. The participants were extremely pleased at this gesture and a good deal of headway was achieved to rebuild bridges with Nigeria's Muslim Northeast. Similarly in the Southwest roundtable participants were appreciative of the outreach by the U.S. Mission on democracy and our concerns about the country's electoral reform. End Comment.

¶14. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.  
SANDERS